

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD THURSDAY 16TH JULY 2020

12:00 – 13:00, ZOOM

PRESENT: Jenny Rathbone MS (Chair), Ryland Doyle (on behalf of Mike Hedges MS), Mia Rees (on behalf of Suzy Davies MS), Sarah Rees (maternity cover for Bethan Sayed MS)

IN ATTENDANCE: Rachael Clarke (BPAS), Ro Cutmore (BPAS), Amanda Davies (Swansea Bay), Bronwen Davies (ARC), Faye Farthing (Endometriosis UK), Rachel Gilmore (Cwm Taf), Billie Hunter, Craig Lawton (BMA), Laura McAllister (BPAS), Andrew McMullan (BPAS), Vivienne Rose (BPAS), Caroline Scherf (Cardiff & the Vale), Alison Scouller (ARC), Debbie Shaffer (FTWW), Michelle Townsend, Sarah Witcombe-Hayes (NSPCC)

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Jenny Rathbone (JR) opened the meeting.

2. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD 18TH JUNE 2020

The minutes were agreed.

3. MATTERS ARISING

Public consultation on mifepristone at home in England – RC updated the group that as part of the Domestic Abuse Bill's passage through the House of Commons, the [UK](#) Government had committed to undertaking a public consultation on making mifepristone at home a permanent provision of the law. Amanda Davies said that the Welsh CMO was supportive of a similar provision in Wales.

Northern Ireland abortion regulations – RC updated the group that the Northern Ireland abortion regulations had passed through Parliament and established a framework for abortion provision in NI. All health boards were currently providing up to 10 weeks, some up to 12 and beyond in certain circumstances. Women were still being funded by Westminster to travel to England if necessary.

Buffer zones bill in Westminster – A Ten Minute Rule Bill from Rupa Huq MP that would introduce buffer zones around all abortion clinics and services that provided abortions had passed First Reading in the House of Commons 213 – 47. MPs were seeking to work with the Government to find a way to move forward with legislation that would apply to both England and Wales.

Letter on menstrual well-being in the school curriculum – Debbie Shaffer and Faye Farthing updated the group on a letter being drafted to the Education Committee asking for menstrual wellbeing to be included in the health aspect of the curriculum, as it is in England. An email will be circulated asking for signatures.

4. PERINATAL MENTAL HEALTH AND CARE DURING COVID-19

Sarah Rees - Sarah Rees introduced findings from a survey she had conducted of over 250 new parents across Wales on the post-natal healthcare for women during Covid-19.

- 67% of women who had given birth since lockdown had not received a post-natal check-up;
- 92% of new parents said they felt isolated due to lockdown restrictions;

- 18% of new parents were receiving support for their mental health – a further 21% would like to, but only half knew who to ask; and
- As a result of lack of availability or long waiting lists for counselling, many new parents are forced to pay for private care.

The over-arching findings of the survey were that pre-existing poor provision particularly around mental health for new parents had been worsened by lockdown – particularly regarding isolation and a lack of access to support where needed.

Dr Sarah Witcombe-Hayes – Sarah Witcombe-Hayes introduced work she had done in conjunction with the NSPCC and the Maternal Mental Health Alliance, particularly focused on the availability of perinatal mental health support.

- 1 in 5 mums and 1 in 10 dads will experience mental health problems during pregnancy and in the year after birth;
- Mental health problems are one of the leading causes of maternal deaths in the UK, often from suicide;
- There has been notable development in perinatal mental health provision in Wales in the last five years, including the announcement of government funding in 2017 to ensure that there were perinatal services in every area in Wales;
- In 2018, the Maternal Mental Health Alliance found that less than a third of health board areas in Wales had specialist support which was meeting national standards;
- There is still no mother and baby unit for women with severe perinatal mental ill-health – there is expected to be an interim 6-bed unit operational by February 2021;
- During Covid-19, one of the particular issues has been the inability of partners to attend scans and assessments, particularly where problems with the pregnancy were found; and
- There needs to be additional work on how to manage the expected surge in mental health referrals as a result of Covid-19 and new parents' isolation.

Michelle Townsend – Michelle Townsend shared her experience as a new parent – having given birth in October 2019, and with her baby having spent just over four months in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit.

- Neonatal outreach team has been good and visits every fortnight during lockdown – but they are there for the baby and not for the parents, as is the case with health visitors;
- Telephone appointments for a baby that has newly come home had been stressful, especially as there had been no physical checks of her heart or lungs despite chronic lung disease;
- Once paternity leave was over, isolation became an issue as there were no relief options; and
- She was referred for post-natal counselling in January 2020 - this still hasn't taken place.

5. DISCUSSION OF ISSUES RAISED BY SPEAKERS

Discussion included focus on the regional disparity of existing and proposed care, post-Covid recovery and restoration planning, lack of breastfeeding support, and video consultations and care. Specifically, this included:

- The single proposed mother and baby unit would be located in Swansea, which for residents in North Wales is impossible to access – meaning women in this situation would lose family support through lack of ability to travel, or be forced to travel to England and risk lack of continuity of services;
- How and when face-to-face mental health services will be re-established safely;

- Particular concerns related to Covid-19 and transmission through breastmilk, and the dissemination of evidence and support for new parents.

It was **agreed** that as a result of the meeting, the group would:

- Look at the possibility of supporting all health boards to have a lead or champion of perinatal mental health services; and
- Write to Vaughan Gething to ask the Welsh Government to support the NCT Hidden Half Campaign – more funding for GP post-natal checks so that every new mother is entitled to a dedicated appointment, and for there to be better guidance and maternal mental health training for doctors. [Action JR](#)

6. EXPANDING REPRESENTATION OUTSIDE CARDIFF

Postponed until the next meeting.

Next meeting: August 2020 tbc – Contraception during Covid-19